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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 003086

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/22/2016
TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL MASS NP
SUBJECT: BOUCHER DISCUSSES THE FUTURE OF THE NEPAL ARMY

REF: A. KATHMANDU 1376

¶B. SECSTATE 181356
¶C. KATHMANDU 3022

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C/NF) In a November 16 meeting with Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher, Ramesh Jung Thapa, Defense Advisor to the Prime Minister, and Bishnu Uprety, Defense Secretary, described an improving relationship between the Nepal Army and the civilian leadership. In a separate November 16 meeting, Chief of Army Staff General Rukmangud Katawal told Assistant Secretary Boucher that the civil-military relationship was strong. Boucher stressed the importance of Nepal's role in UN peacekeeping operations around the world, and hoped the civilian and military leadership would continue such a role. Thapa, Uprety, and Katawal all suggested alternative methods for providing lethal and non-lethal military assistance to the Nepal Army that they believed would not compromise the ongoing peace negotiations between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists. Boucher also pushed both the civilian and military leadership to investigate and punish serious past and present human rights abuses in the Nepal Army.

Relationship Between Army and Civilian Government Has Improved

¶2. (C) In a November 16 meeting with Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher, Defense Advisor to the Prime Minister Ramesh Jung Thapa and Defense Secretary Bishnu Uprety both described an improving

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relationship between the Nepal Army and the civilian government. Thapa referred to the newly revised Army Act as a significant step toward promoting greater transparency and accountability. Both Thapa and Uprety expressed appreciation for the recent U.S.-funded conference on security sector reform the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies had sponsored that brought together civilian, military, and

police leadership. Uprety lamented the lack of capacity and manpower within the Ministry of Defense.

¶13. (C) In a separate November 16 meeting, General Rukmangud Katawal told Boucher that the Nepal Army was happy to work under civilian control and described a good relationship with the civilian leadership. Katawal said he spent much of his time wooing the senior leadership of the political parties to try and convince them that he was serious about working under their leadership. Katawal complained that the leaders seemed convinced while he was talking with them one-on-one, but later they would say something different to the press.

Boucher Stresses Importance of Nepal's UN Peacekeeping Role

¶14. (C) Both Thapa and Katawal described with pride the more than 3,000 Nepali soldiers who were posted overseas in support of UN Peacekeeping Operations. Boucher stressed the important role that Nepali soldiers played in UN peacekeeping operations, and thanked the civilian and military leadership for providing them. Uprety thanked the U.S. for its support to the Peacekeeping Operations Training Center in Panchkhal. Everyone agreed that peacekeeping operations offered excellent opportunities for Nepali soldiers; they provided training opportunities, experience, and good salaries for those who participated.

Alternative Method for Lethal Assistance

¶15. (C/NF) Thapa and Katawal both suggested an alternative method to provide lethal military assistance to the Nepal Army. Katawal suggested that Nepali peacekeepers could go to their postings in Haiti or other places without weapons. Then, upon arrival, the U.S. could provide weapons and ammunition to the group for their peacekeeping duties. When the group returned to Nepal at the end of their tour, Katawal continued, they could bring the weapons and ammunition back with them. Both Thapa and Katawal noted that this solution would avoid upsetting the Maoists and would allow lethal support to arrive without the political complications involved with delivery inside Nepal.

U.S. Support

¶16. (C/NF) Assistant Secretary Boucher asked Uprety, Thapa, and Katawal about future non-lethal assistance to Nepal, and when Nepal would be able to take possession of non-lethal Excess Defense Articles currently in storage around the world. Both the civilian and military leadership responded that this was a political decision. Once the Prime Minister agreed to allow the articles into Nepal, the Ministry of Defense and the Nepal Army would act on those orders immediately.

Human Rights

¶17. (C) Assistant Secretary Boucher pushed Thapa and Katawal hard regarding the Nepal Army's human rights record. Thapa and Katawal told Boucher that the Nepal Army and the Ministry of Defense were committed to identifying and punishing current and future human rights abuses. However, both the civilian and military leadership were hesitant to accept responsibility for or agree to investigate past abuses, such as the Maharajgunj incident identified in the May 2006 report from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (ref A). Uprety and Katawal explained that a Brigadier General was going to be put in charge of the Nepal Army's Human Rights Cell, showing, they claimed, the seriousness with which the Nepal Army took human rights. Boucher stressed to both the civilian and military leadership the necessity of responding to past human rights abuses.

Maoist Role in Future Security Forces Unclear

¶8. (C/NF) Thapa said it was unclear whether Maoist combatants would be integrated into the Nepal Army, and expressed a great deal of apprehension about the possibility. Katawal stated that the sincerity and honesty of the Maoists was suspect, given their lack of adherence to any of their previous agreements. Katawal noted that the Maoists had continued to challenge the Nepal Army across the country, stopping convoys and chanting slogans outside the gates of Army camps. Katawal told Boucher that the Army was currently exercising "maximum restraint," but worried that he would not be able to control units posted to the countryside if the Maoists continued on this track. He said that he feared a confrontation if the situation did not improve.

Comment

¶9. (C/NF) It was a good sign that both the civilian and military leadership of the Nepal Army spoke with one voice on most issues, demonstrating the obvious efforts since the people's movement in April to consolidate civilian control and improve civil-military relations. The alternative suggestion for providing lethal assistance is interesting, and bears looking into, although any decision to employ this method would require the Prime Minister's approval. We will continue to push both the civilian and military leadership on accountability for past abuses. General Katawal's concern about his ability to control his troops in the event of continued Maoist provocation is worrisome, since Maoist provocation will no doubt continue. The Ambassador in a subsequent conversation warned Katawal that his comment could be interpreted as threatening the civilian government; Katawal hastily demurred. The biggest question, however, for the Nepal Army and the people of Nepal is how do the Maoists intend to behave once they are in an interim government.

¶10. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this cable.
MORIARTY